

A REVIEW OF IKECHUKWU ANTHONY KANU'S "AMADIOHA AS A PREFIGURATION OF CHRIST IN IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION: IGWEBUIKE AND THE MISSIONARY MISSING LINK"

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DOI: [10.13140/RG.2.2.28703.51361](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.28703.51361)

The issue related to comparative religion is as old as the scientific study of religion itself. Religious beliefs and practices as well as personalities and configuration of deities have received continuous attention from scholars of various specific areas in the general field of religious studies. Prof Kanu's contribution to this on-going academic discourse is however unique in some sense. Firstly, it attempted at drawing similarities between two seeming opposing deities from two religions that have been competing for space and relevance among the Igbo from the 19th century. This comparison might appear awkward to an average Igbo Christian on the understanding that Christianity is a unique religion that should stand taller than any other religion, and as such, there should be no need for any comparative study of this nature. This, however, is fallacy of exclusivism in religious scholarship. Secondly, the early European missionaries who pioneered Christian missionary enterprise in Igboland left the impression of Igboland being the citadel of devil. Amadioha was dubbed an agent of the devil that should be defeated and stamped out for Christ to reign among the Igbo. Centuries later, Prof Kanu dared to argue that Amadioha could be an imperfect expression of Christ given to the Igbo in preparation for the revelation of Christ. This is a bold step.

Prof Kanu began his argument by lamenting the 1813 act of the British parliament given by Thomas Babington Macaulay in a bid to set aside money for the promotion of scientific study and native literature among the British colonies. It was obviously, according to Kanu, an attempt to dismantle the good values that Africans shared in the past. Not because those values were in inherently bad or even offensive to Christian morality, but it was basically a move to colonize and exploit Africa. For Kanu, that formed the basis for which African Traditional Religion was relegated and her deities demonized.

Kanu posits that a number of Africans saw this coming, for instance, Achebe (1958), Isichei (1970), Uzukwu (1988) and others. However, their voices were either not loud enough to mobilize Africans for resistance, or that they were gauged by European colonial machineries. Kanu's effort, therefore, is an attempt to write an African history from the African perspective. He argues that Jesus came from the Jewish extraction and tended to offer a new and revolutionary way of life for the Jews, which was to be extended to the whole world. Yet He said He did not come to abolish their customs and traditions, but rather to fulfill them. It is along this line that Kanu frowns that the early European missionaries to Africa appeared to have been vocal where Jesus was silent. Hence, they were overzealous in condemning African Traditional religious practices without biblical warrants. Kanu drew inference from the argument posed by Justin the Martyr who holds that different cultures were inspired by God and should be appropriate for His service. He went further to say that culture is a pre-figuration of Christ: a *Logos spermatikos* (seed bearing word). He taught that the *Spermatic Logos* has been implanted in the heart of every human culture since all things were created through Christ, with Him and for Him. St Paul, Kanu says, already dismantled the barrier of cultural discrimination through a superior argument he made at the first Christian council in Jerusalem, where he said that the line between the Jews and the gentiles should not impede the spread of Christianity as a universal religion. An idea St Paul pressed home through his polite approach to the Athenians in his missionary engagement with them.

Kanu then made projections which convincingly posits that Amadioha in Igbo Traditional Religion could be the same thing as the Christian Christ: For him Christ is the son of God in Christian concept, while Amadioha is the son of Chineke in Igbo understanding; Christ is the light of the world, and Amadioha is symbolized with light; Christ is symbolized with lamb, and Amadioha is symbolized with ram; Christ is the intermediary between man and God, Amadioha is an intermediary between the traditional Igbo and Chineke; Christ was sent by God to do His will on earth, Amadioha does not do anything on his own without order from Chineke; Christ was a co-creator of the world, Amadioha is conceived as a creator God by the Igbo; Christ emanated from God and not created, Amadioha emanated from Chineke.

Much as this eloquent comparative study is appreciated, however, Kanu also unwittingly became a victim of some form of derogation on Amadioha. He presented Amadioha as an imperfect being that was given to the Igbo in

preparation for the ultimate coming of Christ. This somewhat reduced Amadioha only to the derogatory position of pathfinder whose duties should expire as soon as the master comes. He did not consider that in as much as Amadioha might not be of the same status with Christ in the spiritual realm, he still has his distinctive function that has not been abolished or taken over by Christ in Igbo understanding.

He erroneously thinks also that the Igbo worship Amadioha. That appears to be a show of limited understanding of the Igbo in their worship of God. The Igbo would not have been worshiping Amadioha since they had the conviction that Amadioha is the son of Chineke. So why worship the son when you are conscious of the existence of the father?

Nevertheless, Kanu has provoked a burning issue that should command the attention of every scholar in the area of comparative study. He has opened up avenue for further robust discussions that is meant to expose African Traditional Religion to universal acknowledgments that she deserves.

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IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities. Vol. 5. No. 8. ISSN: 2488-9210 (Print) 2504-9038 (Online) 2019.

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